

The Appropriations Committee

February 9, 2010

Testimony in Support of the Budget of the Office of Consumer Counsel

Mary J. Healey, Consumer Counsel

Thank you Co-Chairs, ranking members and all members of the Appropriations Committee for your invitation to speak to you today.

OCC's Protection of Utility Ratepayer Interests has Direct Linkage to Economic Development and Critical Consumer Protections:

The Office of Consumer Counsel is an independent state agency and acts as the advocate for consumer interests in all matters which may affect Connecticut consumers with respect to public service companies or regulated utility companies, such as electric, natural gas and water suppliers, and various telecommunications providers. The millions of ratepayers living and working in Connecticut are now facing utility costs that have become a major portion of residential and business budgets. More than ever, they need the OCC to fight as their independent advocate to hold the line on ever rising utility rates and decreases in customer service and reliability. This is especially critical in today's economic climate, because reasonable energy rates work to preserve jobs and retain businesses here in Connecticut.

OCC is Not a General Fund Expense

The costs and expenses of the OCC are entirely funded from assessments of the gross receipts of public utility companies, paid by the ratepayers of those utilities. This means that OCC is not truly an "expense" item on the state's budget.

In fact, the OCC "transfers" over \$600,000 from ratepayer funds in "payment" annually for various services rendered to the OCC by other state agencies funded through the General Fund. This includes, for instance, payments to DOIT for computer services and DAS for human resource (such as CHRO compliance) and hiring support.

OCC Provides Legislature and Other Public Officials with Ratepayer Perspective on Energy & Technology Issues: i.e. Your Constituents

Every year, many legislators rely on the objective and expert counsel of the OCC in evaluating the effects that proposed legislation may have on public utility consumers, residential and business. We welcome such inquiries and encourage all legislators to reach out to the OCC as needed to receive the value of OCC's ratepayer perspective on pending bills and all other utility policy issues affecting your districts.

Time Tested Rationale for an Independent Advocate for Ratepayers

Over thirty years ago, this Legislature recognized that ratepayers need an independent advocate with funding separate from the General Fund, an entity solely charged to look out for their interests without a conflict of interest or competing agenda.

The OCC represents each of you personally and your constituents who, as ratepayers, pay for utility services provided by our regulated utility companies. You and your constituents expect to receive reliable and safe public utilities services and products, all at just and reasonable prices, and that is the OCC's statutory mandate and goal. Please visit our website at www.ct.gov/occ to review our results for ratepayers. We provide a scorecard, updated quarterly, which tabulates the amount of actual dollars OCC's advocacy saves utility ratepayers. This is concrete evidence of OCC's commitment to Results Based Accountability.

Thank you.